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Chairman: Mr. Hachani ..... (Tunisia)
later: Mr. Carranza (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Guatemala)

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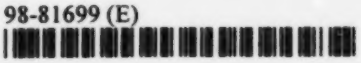

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda Item 103: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/53/38/Rev.1, A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95-S/1998/311, A/53/167, 203, 318, 354, 363, 376, 409 and 447)

Agenda Item 104: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95-S/1998/311 and A/53/308)

1. **Mr. Rabuka** (Fiji) said that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action represented an acknowledgment by the international community that the advancement of women was a global problem requiring global effort. There were indications that actions by the international community were on the right track, as Governments had begun putting in place national programmes to implement their commitments under the Platform for Action. It was too early for complacency, however, since it was also clear that true gender equality was still far off. In the developing countries in particular, globalization had meant increased marginalization and exclusion, particularly among women.

2. His Government was fully aware that women's rights were not abstract aspirations and was striving to operationalize their rights to freedom from poverty, illness and violence in all forms. To that end, it had recently launched a Women's Plan of Action and had established a Department of Women and Culture. Among initiatives undertaken, that Department was in the process of establishing a database of women with the potential to participate at all levels of decision-making. The Women's Social and Economic Development Programme had been established to improve access by women to microcredit funds for income-generating projects. Since 1995, the Fiji Law Reform Commission had been at work reviewing laws which were disadvantageous to women. Nationwide literacy programmes would help to promote understanding of the gender aspects of relevant legislation. His Government was mindful of the important role played by non-governmental organizations and civil society in meeting Fiji's international obligations and had forged strong links with such bodies. As an example, the Fiji National Council of Women was the umbrella body for women's non-governmental organizations and had been closely involved in the preparation of the recently launched Women's Plan of Action.

3. His country faced constraints in financial and human resources in putting in place all the programmes it wished because of structural-adjustment directives from multilateral financial institutions requiring reduction in public spending or zero growth in public service. His delegation therefore called on the international community to extend a helping hand if it was genuinely interested in helping small-island developing States like Fiji to protect and advance the interests of women.

4. **Mr. Monagas** (Venezuela) said that despite the progress made in the priority areas defined by the Beijing Platform for Action, for millions of women in various regions of the world, justice and equality seemed to belong to another world. Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, pregnancy-related deaths, the rise in women infected by the AIDS virus, violence and inequality in the workplace had reached unacceptable levels in a century which boasted of its great technological achievements. It had frequently been said that the cause of women was the cause of all humanity, but the time had come for specific mechanisms and structures in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres to eliminate gender inequality.

5. In Venezuela, gender equality was enshrined in the Constitution. In the area of violence against women, the National Council of Women had drafted a bill on violence against women and in the family which had recently been adopted by the Congress. An intensive promotional campaign in the mass media was being conducted to raise awareness of programmes on abuse of women.

6. Venezuela was working for the implementation of policies in favour of women. The combined efforts of the State and all segments of society to achieve social justice and improve the quality of life, particularly for women, became even more important as those goals drew nearer.

7. **Ms. Fritsche** (Liechtenstein) said that Liechtenstein's membership in international organizations had played a crucial role in bringing about domestic changes in the situation of women, both on a policy level and by raising awareness. The Fourth World Conference on Women had had a direct impact on the situation of women in Liechtenstein, and as an outcome of the Beijing Conference, it had acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, this contributing to the goal of universal ratification by the year 2000. The Convention was an important tool for the advancement of women, but its implementation was seriously hampered by the high number of reservations, which must be addressed as part of the campaign for its universal ratification. Her Government was of the view that the adoption of an optional protocol giving the Committee established under the Convention the competence to consider individual

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communications would give additional momentum to its work.

8. One of the areas of the Beijing Platform for Action of critical importance to her country was the issue of violence against women. Her Government had extended an invitation to the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women and it also welcomed the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the issue of women in armed conflict.

9. The adoption of the Statute of an International Criminal Court had been an important development in that regard. In adopting that Statute, the international community had recognized that rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, and forced sterilization or other forms of sexual violence constituted crimes against humanity and war crimes. Her delegation hoped that a number of women judges would be nominated by their Governments and elected to the Court. It also attached particular importance to the increasingly important role of women in preventive diplomacy, post-conflict peace-building and peacekeeping.

10. The overall situation of women in the Secretariat remained a concern, especially their representation at higher levels. While the personal commitment of the Secretary-General was welcome, special measures would be needed if the goal of 50/50 gender distribution by the year 2000 was to be met. In conclusion, her delegation agreed with the statement of the European Union that the causes rather than the symptoms and consequences of women's inequality needed to be addressed, which included the roles and attitudes of men.

11. **Ms. Weasley** (Australia) said that, in the fiftieth anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it must be acknowledged that although much had been achieved to advance the status of women internationally, for many millions of women those aspirations had not yet been realized. Discrimination and violence persisted, embedded in cultures around the world so deeply that many women considered it a normal part of life. The high-level review planned for 2000 would be an opportunity to develop strategies for overcoming the continuing barriers to the full implementation of international instruments in that area.

12. Australia had implemented wide-ranging reforms to advance the status of women and had put in place a robust framework of anti-discrimination legislation. Actions violating the human rights of women were prohibited by law and all forms of physical and sexual violence against women had been criminalized. Of particular note was the national campaign to eliminate domestic violence. Australian society was made up of people from all parts of the world who brought with them many traditional, religious or cultural practices. It welcomed the diversity of its society, but practices that constituted violence against women could not be overlooked or justified on the grounds of traditional culture. In view of the concern that women and girls migrating from some parts of the world might be at risk from female genital mutilation after settling in Australia, federal and state governments had adopted a prevention strategy involving both legislation and community-education initiatives.

13. A major factor in women's enjoyment of fundamental rights was their ability to participate fully in political and economic life. Although women were still under-represented in politics, the Government had recently appointed a number of women to senior positions.

14. The gap between specialized women's machinery and general, or mainstream, human rights mechanisms must be bridged. Human rights treaty monitoring bodies and special procedure mechanisms, such as special rapporteurs, must give increasing attention to the gender dimension of their work. An effective partnership between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights was vital. In that connection, her delegation welcomed the presence of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at the most recent session of the Commission on the Status of Women and such initiatives as the basic information kit called "Women's rights: the Responsibility of All". The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had a key role to play in providing gender-disaggregated data on human rights monitoring, identifying gender-specific violations and providing gender training for human rights monitors in the field.

15. Her delegation looked forward to the next meeting of the open-ended Working Group on the Elaboration of a Draft Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to be held in parallel with the forty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women. It also welcomed the Secretary-General's renewed commitment to achieving gender equality in the Secretariat, given the unacceptably low level of representation of women at the D-1 level and above, and the new strategies being adopted to achieve the 50/50 goal. Managerial commitment and accountability were vital to improving the gender balance in the United Nations. Her delegation had urged the Secretary-General to consider qualified women candidates for the post of special representative and was pleased that he had done so in a number of cases during the past year. Her delegation

encouraged him to continue along that path and also urged Member States to nominate competent women candidates for his consideration.

16. **Ms. Ahmed** (Sudan) said that Sudanese women played an effective role in the life of her country and were accorded equal rights and responsibilities pursuant to the Constitution adopted by popular referendum in 1998. Women occupied high-level political and judicial positions and were constitutionally guaranteed a minimum of 25 per cent of the membership of Parliament and 10 per cent of that of popular committees. Women currently represented about 9 per cent of the National Assembly, and 24 per cent of state councils. Foremost amongst the legislation that had been passed with regard to equality in employment were the law of public service and the 1997 labour law. All the legislation adopted had complied with international and regional conventions. Sudanese women also played an important role in the national economy, representing over one quarter of the labour force mostly in the agricultural sector.

17. The Sudan had been one of the first countries to respond to the recommendations of international conferences on the advancement of women, and had established numerous official, popular and voluntary mechanisms to support women's activities. For example, the unit for women's advancement had been established in 1975 in the Ministry of Social Welfare. In 1993 a women's department had been established in the Ministry of Social Planning and was responsible for developing overall women's policies in coordination with the women's units in other ministries and the administrative districts, and for defining the general goals for the advancement of women and the family. A number of non-governmental organizations in the country were involved in women's development, largely with a view to reducing illiteracy and alleviating poverty.

18. Despite the many gains made by Sudanese women, the implementation of women's programmes was often difficult, owing to the low level of foreign technical assistance and to lack of infrastructure in the regions affected by war in the south of the country. Some three million people, mostly women and children, had been displaced as a result of that war. The Government was making enormous efforts to bring peace to the country and enable all citizens, men and women, to contribute to development. The question of women must be dealt with by each society in accordance with its cultural and traditional particularities, but her delegation believed that the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women represented the first step towards the empowerment of women in all sectors of society.

19. *Mr. Carranza (Guatemala), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

20. **Mrs. Ghimire** (Nepal) said that the relationship between the advancement of women and economic performance was an acknowledged fact. Over the previous 50 years, the United Nations had played an important role in securing the legal foundations of equality, recognizing the role of women in development and remaining open to ideas emanating from non-governmental organizations and civil society.

21. In many countries there was still a vast gap between women's rights at the legislative and policy levels, and the actual status of women. Major world conferences had not only drawn the attention of the global community to gender bias, but had also brought the global networking on gender parity into sharper focus.

22. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/53/308). All forms of violence against women were of deep concern. As a party to the Convention, Nepal called for measures to end such discrimination and acts of violence.

23. As in the case of many developing countries, Nepal had a low rate of literacy and women formed a large segment of the total illiterate population. Her Government had recently established a separate Ministry of Women and Social Welfare dedicated to issues relating to women. Special measures had also been taken to encourage the involvement of women in development through the adoption of basic policies on general- and technical-education programmes, and the compulsory appointment of female teachers. Activities relating to safe motherhood, immunization, family-planning services and population education were also in progress.

24. Further measures had been taken for the induction of women into the political and administrative spheres, in full recognition of their participation in the popular movement for the restoration of multi-party democracy. An electoral provision had been made for 20 per cent of seats in the village development committees to be earmarked for women and that provision had greatly enhanced women's mobilization. Nearly 40,000 women had been elected in the primary level of the political hierarchy.

25. It was disheartening to note that, despite the continued efforts of the United Nations, women represented the largest socially excluded group. Women bore a disproportionate share of suffering emanating from social disintegration, unemployment, environmental degradation and war. It was

only through the sharing of power, resources and responsibilities that an effective contribution could be made to bridging the gender disparity. Nepal fully supported the efforts of the United Nations system in raising concern over traditional practices affecting women, the trafficking in women and girls, and gender discrimination, which were adversely affecting the dignity, honour and rights of women. There was urgent need for a broader vision of a new world order characterized by equal opportunities and rights between women and men. That vision must inspire the work of the international community in the coming century.

26. Her delegation encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his concern regarding the need for publicity, advocacy and outreach efforts to promote awareness of gender issues and the need to achieve equality. Nepal firmly believed that there should be full parity in the representation of women in education, government, business and international organizations.

27. **Ms. Eshmambetova** (Kyrgyzstan) said that, although two years remained before the high-level review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a gender approach would require greater concerted action and coordination among Governments, international and non-governmental organizations to improve the status of women.

28. In Kyrgyzstan, the National Plan of Action reflected almost all 12 problem areas in the Beijing Platform and also listed country-specific needs and priorities. Mechanisms such as the National Commission on the Status of Women and the women's initiatives centres located in all six regions of the Republic had played the largest role in developing the programme. Over 100 women's organizations had also taken part in its implementation, with international support. With the help of its partners, two women's crisis centres had been opened in Bishkek to provide legal, psychological and medical assistance to women. Women's access to land and credit was a major problem, since women made up the majority of the agricultural sector. Providing them with microcredit helped them not only to survive under difficult economic conditions but gave them a more active role in the country's social and political life.

29. Many international organizations and donor countries had provided assistance in that area, including the World Bank and UNDP, which had opened a Women in Development office. UNIFEM had begun its activities in the country with a project concerning violence against women. However, despite those successes, women in Kyrgyzstan had not yet achieved the desired progress. Improving the status of women must be considered as a basic component of a successful, just and democratic society.

30. **Ms. Leeran** (Israel) said that the establishment of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office, was but one example of the significant progress achieved in Israel in the areas outlined by the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Authority had been established under the Law for the Advancement of the Status of Women, adopted in 1998, which promoted equality of the sexes and ensured coordination among bodies relating to the status of women through education, legislation and law enforcement. It also promoted activities for the prevention of violence against women.

31. The Authority would foster the advancement of women and equality between the sexes and would combat discrimination and violence. It had already launched a programme on gender equality and the prevention of domestic violence, particularly against women, through education and it organized lectures and workshops on the prevention of violence for recruits of the Israeli Defence Forces and government employees. It was also attempting to build awareness, particularly among Arab women, new immigrants and ultra-orthodox Jewish women, on the importance of periodical medical screening. The Authority had promoted a law on sexual harassment in the workplace, which had entered into force in 1998; it sponsored professional training programmes for women in the fields of computers and communications, particularly for Arab women, new immigrants and ultra-orthodox Jewish women; and encouraged unemployed single mothers to seek work in order to support their families. It planned to encourage business and career women to foster equal pay for women and the appointment of women to high-level positions.

32. The progress achieved with regard to the advancement of women was the result of the unremitting efforts of Israeli women's rights organizations and non-governmental organizations, which had long been active in promoting women's rights even before the establishment of the State of Israel. Thanks to their efforts, Israel had an extensive infrastructure of child care centres, neighbourhood infant health clinics, professional training courses, legal aid offices and family health assistance programmes for young women and adults.

33. **Mr. Ngay** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that his country was one of the few which, due to its geostrategic situation, and vast human and natural resources, had endured a history of suffering and scandalous violations of the human rights of its people. As he spoke, the people

of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly women and children living in the regions occupied by invading soldiers were victims of large-scale violations of the basic rules of international law, including rape, extermination, deportation and other heinous crimes. The Congolese women had been constantly exposed to the risks of contagion by the HIV/AIDS virus and unwanted pregnancies. The Vatican had spoken out in condemnation of the escalation of atrocities, particularly after the massacre of dozens of religious leaders and innocent parishioners in August 1998.

34. In the midst of silence on the part of the international community, a Ugandan journalist had confirmed the abhorrent acts of violence committed against women by the occupying Ugandan army in the town of Kisangani. The women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo were left defenseless and seemingly alone in their sufferings. He wondered whether the silence should be interpreted as complicity or indifference.

35. The aggression against his country had begun in August 1998, just as the Government had been laying a foundation for a democratic way of life and the restoration of respect and dignity to all Congolese people. The Government had launched a triennial plan of national reconstruction encompassing gender-specific dimensions in all areas, and the National Bureau of Action and Social Advancement had already begun to play an exemplary role in placing woman at the forefront of key national sectors. The time in which a woman's role was limited to housekeeping had passed. Women in Africa were, first and foremost, teachers and counsellors and were actively engaged in asserting their rights. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, all legal instruments reinforced the new role of African women. A 1987 Act on the Family Code had been amended to replace the concept of marital authority with parental authority. Violations of those rules were viewed as offences, as were all customs based on the inequality of the sexes and practices which endangered the health and dignity of women. Special legal mechanisms for the protection of women had also been introduced in the area of employment and education. Furthermore, the Constitution, which was under review, would include explicit guarantees of parity between the sexes.

36. His delegation welcomed the efforts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to ensure respect for and application of the Convention. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was also pleased that the efforts made to promote ratification of the Convention. He commended the work of the pre-sessional Working Group in obtaining information on the status of women in specific countries and urged application of that practice to all Member States. His delegation appreciated the Secretary-General's report on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/53/376) and he noted the progress made in achieving the goal of gender equality within the Secretariat.

37. He appealed to the solidarity of all women to heed the distress signals of Congolese women living in the occupied regions, and thereby make an effective contribution to the advancement of women, which was indispensable for world peace.

38. **Mr. Mapuranga** (Zimbabwe) said that social, economic and political issues must incorporate women's concerns in their core in order to ensure that women enjoyed equality as partners and occupied their rightful place as decision makers. The participation of women in programme evaluation would bring fresh ideas and innovative solutions to the problems facing the world. The acknowledgement of injustice and the need for changes to discriminatory cultural patterns, laws and norms of behaviour were positive developments.

39. Some progress had been made in the economic empowerment, education and training, of Zimbabwean women, and in their participation in political life. The Ministry of National Affairs, Employment Creation and Cooperatives, with UNDP assistance, had embarked on a project on Women in Politics and Decision-Making aimed at encouraging women to stand as candidates in elections. On the economic front, a women's bank had been established to offer banking and credit access to marginalized groups. It also provided for the possibility for them to own the majority of the bank's shares. Zimbabwe was working to strengthen national machinery through gender focal points in ministries. Action plans to facilitate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and gender mainstreaming were under way.

40. With respect to the justice system, statutes had been identified with a view to their being amended in order to ensure their compatibility with the Convention. They included the Communal Land Act and the Guardianship of Minors Act. The Convention had been translated into two major vernacular languages, Shona and Ndebele, and a booklet identified gaps and areas of overlap in the legal-rights field and proposed methods for disseminating information to the targeted groups.

41. At the regional level, Zimbabwe had been involved in the formulation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) plan of action for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. National commitment to

the ideals of equality and respect for human rights was unwavering. However, regional efforts were hampered by a scarcity of resources. His Government was convinced that the recent appointment of two gender officers to the SADC Secretariat would generate renewed interest on the part of donors to assist SADC with the tools it needed to ensure gender mainstreaming.

42. There was indeed complementarity between the efforts of SADC and those of other concerned entities. His Government was encouraged by the momentum of debates within that forum, and remained fully committed in its resolve to bring justice to all. The major concern was that legislation-enforcement mechanisms should go in tandem with expectations. Zimbabwe would continue to work assiduously to ensure the mainstreaming of gender, to facilitate the training of women and girls, and to remove any discriminatory laws that continued to hamper women's progress. Perpetrators of violence against women would be convicted in courts that would treat women as equal to men.

43. Furthermore, cumbersome legal and bureaucratic procedures should not hamper the fight against HIV/AIDS. Special appreciation was due to such organizations as UNICEF, WHO and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) for work done in the region in general, and Zimbabwe in particular.

44. **Ms. Leonce** (Saint Lucia), speaking on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that, as there was now a heightened awareness and discussion of women's issues worldwide, the Committee's focus should rather be on implementation of the many agreements on women's rights. Of particular importance were the rights of women to employment and to equal participation in development, because they determined the quality of women's lives and also those of humanity in general. Also, in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it was appropriate to assert those rights for women: denial of them resulted in a large sector of a society remaining underproductive. It was therefore in the best interests of societies and of the world as a whole to assist women in achieving their full potential, not least because women nurtured the future of humanity and the longest-lasting influence on a person's life was that person's mother.

45. CARICOM believed that women must be included in all action plans and strategies of Governments, and of other institutions, if there was to be progress in world economic and social development and if all people were to enjoy their rights.

46. Given that advocacy and awareness had already taken root, CARICOM would continue to encourage Governments to introduce strategies to implement the outcome of global conferences, specifically that of the Fourth World Conference on Women, and to establish or strengthen government mechanisms to implement national strategies and policies.

47. CARICOM was encouraged by the progress made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in reviewing the country reports and by the large number of States that had ratified the Convention. However, the preparation of national plans did not show the same level of progress. CARICOM believed that the situation was serious, and called for greater efforts to assist countries in preparing their national plans and reports.

48. Also, CARICOM member States were concerned that, as reported by the Secretary-General, few country plans established comprehensive, time-bound targets with benchmarks and indicators for monitoring, and most failed to indicate sources of financing. CARICOM believed it was important that Governments should allocate resources so that national plans could be implemented. Also, monitoring and measuring were needed if the special session of the General Assembly in 2000 was to review the implementation of the follow-up to the Beijing Conference.

49. She applauded the efforts of the United Nations system to mainstream a gender perspective in programmes and for the many innovative methods and programmes detailed in the Secretary-General's report (A/53/376).

50. CARICOM was concerned by the increasing levels of poverty among women arising from globalization and trade liberalization, and welcomed the work done by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in identifying opportunities for and threats to sustainable livelihoods for women. It hoped also that studies on the impact of trade liberalization in its region would continue and be expanded, and looked forward to the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in 1999 devoted to the role of employment in poverty eradication and the empowerment of women.

51. The challenge of getting the Governments of the Caribbean Community to take gender into account in their national planning was ongoing, and CARICOM therefore appreciated the assistance from UNIFEM and the Commonwealth Secretariat in a mission to explore the feasibility of establishing a gender-management system in the public sector in Saint Kitts and Nevis and in Antigua and Barbuda. CARICOM looked forward to the establishment of similar management systems throughout the region.

52. There had been no significant progress in curbing violence against women, despite increased awareness of the issue; CARICOM hoped that the activities associated with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights would help in that connection, and welcomed the efforts of UNIFEM in the Latin America and Caribbean Region in launching an inter-agency regional awareness campaign on freedom from violence.

53. CARICOM believed that the addition of gender advisers to the system of resident coordinators was a significant achievement, and hoped that they would be rotated to all regions and countries to strengthen support for national-level implementation of the Platform throughout the world.

54. She reiterated that there could be no implementation without resources and conveyed an appeal by CARICOM to the international community for assistance in translating national plans into action through the involvement of women in government decision-making and through provision of proper health, education, employment opportunities and a conducive environment for women to develop their full potential. Then there would be real economic and social progress, not only for women but for the world, and CARICOM reaffirmed its commitment to doing its part in achieving that goal.

55. **Ms. Majali** (Jordan) said that Jordan was encouraged by the progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in activities by United Nations bodies and also at the national level. Jordan viewed the Declaration and Platform for Action as guidelines for its own national strategy for women's advancement. The National Committee for Women had been entrusted with drawing up policies and identifying priorities for Jordanian women, and had achieved much. In 1996 it had been invested with important responsibilities for coordinating efforts with ministries, public and private institutions and non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, legislation deemed to contain discriminatory clauses had been or was being brought into line with the Constitution and Jordan's commitments under the Convention.

56. Jordan firmly believed that women should be empowered in terms of decision-making and political participation; the Constitution granted men and women equal rights and opportunities to participate in all spheres of social, economic and political life. Indeed, a survey had shown that the barriers were not legislative but attributable rather to social stereotyping and psychological mind-sets about what women viewed as their proper roles. Numerous workshops, seminars and training programmes for local officials and for women from all walks of life fostered a new understanding of women's roles in society and of their political and legal rights and encouraged them to participate in public life.

57. Jordan applauded the outcome of the 1998 session of the Economic and Social Council and the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and supported gender mainstreaming in all United Nations system policies and programmes; indeed, it believed that a gender perspective in reviewing the implementation and follow-up of United Nations conferences was imperative in any approach to tackle the feminization of poverty. Jordan also supported the Secretary-General's efforts to achieve a gender balance at all levels by the year 2000 but stressed that equitable geographical representation must be taken into account.

58. Upon the endorsement of the national economic and social plan for the years 1998 to 2002, all departments of the Jordanian Government had mainstreamed the gender perspective in policy and programme formulation as part of its holistic approach to planning, with the involvement of the National Committee. In education, new topics dealing with women's and children's health care and the promotion of gender equality had been brought into school curricula, and despite a high birth rate, major improvements had been reported in maternal health and infant mortality through better access to health centres and family planning and as a result of awareness campaigns and publications and the child-survival programme.

59. Although there had been a significant increase in the number of women in the work force, it was still low: women were mostly employed in health and education. Indeed, 59 per cent of teachers were women. Economic and social obstacles still impeded full economic participation by women, especially among the poor, because of traditions, limited resources, difficulty in obtaining loans and a lack of skills. In response, special programmes sponsored by non-governmental organizations and the relevant ministries had been established to create small income-generating projects and provide training; however, the projects needed continuous financial assistance.

60. Jordan believed that violence against women was unacceptable and that legal and social measures should be taken against those who perpetrated it: such violence was punishable as a crime. However, for social reasons many incidents went unreported by women. A number of measures had been taken to tackle that problem: the media had become more effective in highlighting it and special family centres had been established in both the Ministry of the Interior and the Directorate of Civil Security to pursue such cases and provide victims with legal and medical assistance.

61. Jordan condemned also all forms of violence against women in armed conflicts and was signatory to the Statute of the International Criminal Court: Jordan considered such crimes, including rape and enforced pregnancy, as crimes against humanity.

62. Jordan was following with interest the progress in drafting the optional protocol to the Convention on the right to petition. It believed, however, that the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties of 1969 did not accord human-rights treaties special status in respect of immunity from reservations.

63. She noted that Miyasser Al-Saadi, a Jordanian woman, had in recent days been honoured by UNDP for her efforts against poverty. Ms. Al-Saadi had wondered aloud in her address if she had given enough of herself; those simple and courageous words reflected women's real potential to give, to lead and to participate as equal partners.

64. **Mrs. Van Lith** (World Health Organization (WHO)) commended the Division for the Advancement of Women for its work in monitoring progress in the area of traditional practices affecting the health of women and children, as reflected in the Secretary-General's report (A/53/354). WHO considered female genital mutilation a form of violence against girls and women that had serious consequences for their physical, psychosocial and sexual health and was committed to the elimination of such practices; it therefore welcomed General Assembly resolution 52/99. WHO affirmed that the human rights of girls and women, including their rights to bodily integrity and to the highest attainable standard of physical, mental and social well-being, must be protected and promoted.

65. WHO condemned the medicalization of female genital mutilation, namely the involvement of health professionals in female genital mutilation in any setting, including hospitals. It had recently convened a technical consultation with nurses, midwives and obstetricians from areas where female genital mutilation was prevalent and, as a follow-up to the recommendations emanating from that exercise, was developing training materials, including guidelines for health-care providers, in order to prevent female genital mutilation, and for managing the health complications that resulted from it. The training materials would be integrated into nursing, midwifery and medical curricula.

66. To deal with harmful traditional practices and female genital mutilation, it was necessary to educate the public, health workers and practitioners of mutilation; that called for the involvement not only of professionals, development workers, local communities and their leaders, and women's groups and organizations, but also of political leaders.

67. In March 1997, the WHO Regional Office for Africa had launched a regional plan of action to accelerate the elimination of female genital mutilation in Africa; it had been launched simultaneously in many African countries and had set short-, medium- and long-term goals to be reached by countries in the region. WHO was also providing technical support for countries to develop national policies and plans. In April 1997 WHO, together with UNICEF and UNFPA had issued a joint statement against female genital mutilation, expressing the three organizations' common purpose of supporting the efforts of Governments and communities to promote and protect the health and development of women and children.

68. The reasons for the slow progress in eliminating female genital mutilation included lack of coordination between prevention programmes and limited investment of resources in them. WHO expected that a well-designed and well-coordinated campaign that had appropriate technical expertise and adequate funding would bring about a major decline in female genital mutilation in 10 years and its elimination within three generations.

69. WHO currently could only estimate the prevalence of female genital mutilation: there were major gaps in the understanding of the extent of the problem, the incidence of health complications and the kinds of intervention that could eliminate the practice. WHO was focusing on increasing knowledge through a research and development programme and on promoting technically sound policies and approaches.

70. WHO had identified six countries in Africa for intensified technical support over the next three years; the project would involve reviewing what was already known about female genital mutilation and supplementing that with research to develop best practices for eliminating it. A systematic review of research on the health complications had already been completed, as had collation of primary data on the socioeconomic and cultural aspect of female genital mutilation, while a review of programming approaches to prevention in various countries would be completed by the end of 1998. WHO would coordinate its work with its United Nations partners and with non-governmental agencies in the various countries.

71. She reported that Dr. Brundtland, the new Director-General of WHO, had said that WHO would reach out to others in the United Nations family to unite their resources and knowledge, work more closely with countries and engage the private sector; they would forge new working relationships so that together they could make a difference to the health of all peoples.

72. **Mr. Gubarevich** (Belarus) said that, even on the threshold of the twenty-first century, in no society did women have the same opportunities as men: gender inequality was so ingrained in people's mentalities that they were often not fully aware of it and accepted it as the natural order, as reflected in practically all forms of State governance. The standard achieved in the mid-twentieth century of equal pay for equal work, equal rights to education and so on, in which so much hope had been invested, had proved insufficient to improve the situation radically.

73. However, much hope was now being invested in the fact that gender equality had recently become the focus of attention from the international community, and the Fourth World Conference on Women had been a landmark in action to that end. The most important problems had been identified, strategic goals had been set and so had temporary frameworks for achieving them. Now the most difficult stage – the practical work – had arrived.

74. The final documents of the Beijing Conference had become fundamental for Belarus: it was basing on them its actions to improve women's status in all areas of life and to enhance their social protection. Belarus had had one of the first national plans of action to improve the status of women (1996–2000) and had submitted it well in advance of the timetable set under the relevant General Assembly resolution. The Government had adopted a comprehensive approach in its "Women of Belarus" programme of 1996; also, in 1997, Belarus had adopted a national sustainable development strategy whereby one of the principal goals was to define a clear-cut State policy on gender equality, improve the representation of women and strengthen their role in the central and local authorities. The Government, while supporting the structures of civil society, was taking specific legislative and practical measures to meet the goals set at Beijing.

75. International cooperation under United Nations auspices had an important role to play in improving the status of women. Support was urgently needed for countries with economies in transition, where socio-economic changes were exacerbated by the current global financial and economic upheavals. The political basis for providing such support was the Beijing Platform for Action, which directly appealed to the United Nations system and also to IMF and the World Bank to assist countries with economies in transition in developing and implementing measures to improve the status of women.

76. Significant assistance was being provided to Belarus by UNDP. The joint project between the Belarus Government and UNDP on women in development had provided significant support for a whole range of national measures.

77. He welcomed the decision by the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board to extend the mandate of UNIFEM to Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. UNIFEM had started practical activities in the region by establishing business contacts, defining priority areas for cooperation and including the region in its current programmes. The Government of Belarus gave high ratings to the Fund's two missions to Belarus and to its support for the national programme on gender-disaggregated statistics. Belarus also supported the project, currently in preparation, that would form a framework for the Fund's work in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and hoped that donors would provide more active assistance for the Fund's activities in the region.

78. His delegation wholeheartedly supported the decision to hold a special session of the General Assembly in 2000 to review progress since the adoption of the Beijing Platform. The special session would provide another stimulus to the efforts of States, Governments and the world community towards improving the status of women. It also welcomed the decision to make the Commission on the Status of Women the preparatory committee for the special session in the belief that the preparatory work, in which Belarus intended to participate, would be most effectively carried out that way and because duplication of effort would thus be avoided.

79. **Ms. Ukaese** (Nigeria) expressed her delegation's full support for the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Of particular interest to Nigeria was the report of the Secretary-General on traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women (A/53/354), an issue which continued to challenge the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. She hoped that it would be given serious consideration by the General Assembly.

80. The Beijing Platform for Action had been followed up in Nigeria by the launching of the Family Support Programme and Family Economic Advancement Programme and by the establishment of the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development and state Ministries of Women's Affairs. Together with non-governmental organizations, those institutions were delivering assistance to rural and urban women and organizing workshops on the implementation of the Beijing Platform. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development had published simple manuals and workbooks

on the 12 critical areas of the Platform for Action with a view to changing discriminatory attitudes in Nigeria.

81. Nigeria had ratified the Convention in 1985 without reservations and had recently submitted its combined second and third periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It had taken note of the Committee's concluding comments, particularly concerning the lack of adequate data in its reporting processes. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development would attempt to improve the statistical content of Nigeria's fourth periodic report.

82. Nigeria had submitted its national action plan to the Division for the Advancement of Women. National gender-mainstreaming activities included a series of workshops organized by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development in cooperation with, *inter alia*, UNDP, UNIFEM and UNICEF. UNDP had been coordinating the activities of the inter-agency forum, a collaborative donor effort in support of the advancement of Nigerian women.

83. Her delegation welcomed the launching of the inter-agency regional campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls in Africa, which would culminate in 16 days of activism in protest of violence from 24 November to 10 December, coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It appreciated the efforts of UNIFEM, UNICEF and UNFPA in that connection.

84. **Ms. Ramírez** (Costa Rica) expressed her delegation's interest in the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/53/376). She noted the goal of 50/50 gender distribution within the Secretariat by the year 2000 in all categories of posts and hoped that the principle of equitable geographical distribution would indeed be respected.

85. As part of the follow-up to the Beijing Conference, Costa Rica was incorporating a number of special laws in its legal system with the aim of eliminating discrimination. That legislation pertained to domestic violence, assistance to impoverished women and the establishment of the National Women's Institute and the Ministry on the Status of Women. The electoral code had been reformed to ensure that 40 per cent of popularly elected posts in the district, cantonal and provincial assemblies were occupied by women. Convinced of the need to ensure that women controlled their own development, Costa Rica was establishing credit policies favourable to women, particularly female heads-of-household in rural areas.

86. **Ms. Ostrauskaite** (Lithuania) said that her delegation supported the statement delivered by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union. The Lithuanian Women's Advancement Programme had been developed jointly by her Government and non-governmental organizations to follow up the Beijing Platform for Action. It covered 10 critical areas, including the protection of women's human rights, women's economic and social status, women and education and women and decision-making. Her Government had also proposed a bill on equal opportunities which was under consideration by the Parliament. The bill provided for the creation of an ombudsman for equal opportunities and labour inspectors in order to ensure gender equality. Lithuania was also working hard to harmonize its employment laws with those of six directives of the European Union, with which it was associated. The Lithuanian Women's Advancement Programme was monitored by both parliamentary and governmental mechanisms for the enforcement of equal rights and opportunities. Not only had Lithuanian women's organizations worked to ensure the integration of a gender perspective in government policies but they had also established a Crisis Centre and counselling services for victims of domestic violence in a joint Lithuania-Norwegian project and, at the local level, shelters for abused women in collaboration with non-governmental organizations.

87. Her delegation welcomed the activities of the Consultative Group for the International Year of Older Persons and supported the proposal by the Commission for Social Development to explore the feasibility of an ageing-related development index for inclusion in the *Human Development Report*. It was deeply concerned that Lithuanian women, who outlived men by an average of 11 years, often had scarce resources and suffered the health problems associated with old age. Her Government had established an advisory group on older persons which would make gender-specific recommendations concerning the status of older women. Her delegation supported gender-mainstreaming activities under the aegis of the Economic and Social Council and looked forward to the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

88. **Ms. Faetanini** (San Marino) said that, in her country, women's representation at the ministerial and sub-ministerial levels was slightly over 21 per cent, or double the world average; at the sub-ministerial level, the critical mass of 30 per cent had been attained. Moreover, in the past two decades, a number of women had occupied the most prestigious post of Captain Regent of the Republic.

89. She expressed deep concern that violence against women and girls remained the most widespread violation of

universal human rights. The trend in which the civilian population, particularly women, accounted for 90 per cent of the casualties in armed conflict was equally disturbing. In that connection her delegation supported the Statute of the International Criminal Court in Rome, adopted in June, which characterized rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and other forms of sexual violence as war crimes.

90. Her delegation welcomed the Committee's consideration of a consensus-based resolution sponsored by the Netherlands, condemning female genital mutilation as a form of violence against women. Criminalization of that practice, however, would only force it underground – which could be damaging, if not fatal, to women – or stigmatize women who rejected it. Her delegation supported the alternative practices outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/354), including "circumcision through words", that focused on the symbolic meaning of that rite of passage but eliminated the harmful physical aspect. In conclusion, she noted that the central theme of World Food Day, "Women feed the world", attested to women's responsibility for the survival of the human species.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.